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UNHCR ACTIVITIES FINANCED BY VOLUNTARY FUNDS: REPORT FOR 1993-1994 AND PROPOSED PROGRAMMES AND BUDGET FOR 1995

PART III. EUROPE

Section 5 - Belgium

(submitted by the High Commissioner)

GE.94-02748

III.5 BELGIUM

Country Overview

Characteristics of the refugee population

1. As at 31 December 1993, Belgium hosted a refugee population of 24,908 persons, representing a slight increase from 1992 (24,292). This number comprises 10,558 females and 14,350 males.

2. During 1993, the Belgian Government registered 26,885 applications for asylum, compared to 17,754 applications in 1992, representing a 51 per cent increase. These persons originate from 131 countries (compared to 123 in 1992), notably Romania (19.2 per cent), Zaire (14.9 per cent), India (11.6 per cent), the republic of the former Yugoslavia (8.4 per cent), Pakistan (4.8 per cent), Ghana (3.7 per cent), Nigeria (3.3 per cent) and Turkey (3.2 per cent). A total of 3,687 persons from the former Yugoslavia were allowed to reside temporarily in Belgium and were registered under the category of displaced persons.

3. In the first four months of 1994, 5,145 persons applied for refugee status in Belgium, a 38 per cent decrease compared to 1993 when, during the same period, 8,258 persons applied for refugee status.

4. In 1993, the Belgian Government recognized 1,111 refugees, a 6.7 per cent recognition rate.

Major developments (1993 and first quarter of 1994)

5. An amendment to the Refugee Act of 15 December 1980 came into force on 1 June 1993. The new legislation included a provision for the withdrawal of UNHCR from participation in the Appeal's Board while maintaining the right of UNHCR to intervene at all stages of the admissibility and eligibility procedure.

6. On 18 March 1994, the Minister of the Interior opened a new "closed centre" for asylum-seekers at Steenokkerzeel, near Zaventem International Airport. The construction of closed centres for asylum-seekers and illegal aliens is part of the Government's strategy to limit abuse of asylum procedures and improve its ability to deport those whose claims have been finally rejected, as well as illegal aliens. As a result, fewer applications for asylum have been registered at Zaventem International Airport and other points of entry while the proportion of applications on national territory has increased.

7. The UNHCR Regional Office in Brussels followed discussions in early 1994 on national measures to ensure burden-sharing among communes as regards the reception and integration of refugees and asylum-seekers. In April 1994, the Regional Representative submitted a report to the Minister of Interior, pursuant to which the creation of a working group to review issues of concern to UNHCR was agreed.

Programme objectives and priorities

8. As in 1993, individual casework related to routine repatriation, resettlement and family reunification activities will continue to be handled by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) partly funded by UNHCR.

9. The main activities of the Regional Office will be to concentrate on the provision of country-of-origin information, to monitor legislative developments, refugee law training and public information, and to engage in private sector fund raising activities.

10. UNHCR will continue in 1994 and 1995 to respond to requests for information from rational authorities, NGOs, attorneys and asylum-seekers particularly regarding legal questions of principle or of a precedent-setting nature. The Regional Office will monitor reception arrangements for asylum-seekers and the implementation of national burden-sharing measures planned by the Belgian federal authorities. A dialogue will continue with the national authorities on the growing phenomenon of unaccompanied-minors seeking asylum particularly regarding reception arrangements.

11. In the course of 1994 and 1995, the Regional Representative will continue to channel inputs into the discussions among members of the European Union regarding the harmonization of asylum law and policy among its member States and will advocate a debate among the European Institutions on refugee and asylum issues in Europe, focusing on the need for a comprehensive response.

12. Contacts with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will also be strengthened in 1994 and 1995 in order to promote cooperation with UNHCR on humanitarian issues and to improve the growing linkage between military and humanitarian action. Training activities are planned with NATO officials as well as those of the European Union.

13. Considerable efforts will continue in 1994 and 1995 to generate awareness of refugee issues among the general public, the media and decision-makers. In line with UNHCR's public information objectives, the Regional Office will explore private-sector fund raising possibilities with major Belgian enterprises and the public at large.

14. An active dialogue with NGOs will be pursued particularly regarding collaborative action in the fields of protection, public information and advocacy.

Arrangements for implementation/related inputs

15. UNHCR's three main operational partners for local settlement activities in Belgium are the "Comité Belge d'Aide aux Réfugiés" (CBAR), "Solidarité Socialiste" (Solsoc) and "Oxfam-Belgium-Colarch" (Colarch). The first two, responsible for the local integration of Chilean refugees arriving under a special government scheme, will complete their activities in 1994 as all outstanding visas for these refugees will have been issued.

General Programmes

1994 planned implementation

16. Fewer asylum-seekers and refugees have lodged requests with UNHCR for financial support than in previous years. As at May 1994, several hundred refugees had been provided support as the Branch Office bore a portion of the administrative costs incurred at the airport refugee reception centre. Ten individuals were provided legal aid under the local settlement project so they could defend their right to be registered in the local population registers.

17. UNHCR continues to support CBAR which, in line with UNHCR's prioritization of activities in Western Europe, took over repatriation, family reunion and resettlement activities, all of which was handled previously by the Regional Office. As at May 1994, 133 persons had been assisted by CBAR. In addition, eleven persons from Chile and other Latin American countries were provided assistance under the local settlement project. No further cases are expected.

1995 programme proposals

Local Settlement

18. The allocation for local settlement is lower than in 1994, as no further Chilean and Latin American refugees are expected to arrive for local integration in 1995. Activities under the local settlement project include UNHCR's support to CBAR.

Special Programmes

Other trust funds

19. A Government-funded Trust Fund project contributing to legal training activities in Western Europe will continue, in 1994 and 1995, to finance the services of specialized lawyers and officials involved in refugee matters who participate in training activities.

20. A special Trust Fund provided by the Belgian Government in 1992 for UNHCR's participation in the Belgian Appeals Board (no longer mandatory) continues until mid-1994 to help finance legal services for UNHCR involvement at the different stages of the eligibility determination procedure.

Programme Delivery and Administrative Support Costs

Variations in planned activities in 1993

21. Expenditure remained within the revised budget estimates. Expenditure incurred as a result of the arrival of the new Representative and Deputy Representative was offset through savings in travel costs and general operating expenses, including utilities. Office premises continued to be provided rent-free by the Government.

(a) **1994 planned implementation**

22. With the expansion of Fund Raising and Public Information activities, the office in Brussels will require some alterations to premises and the replacement of outdated computer equipment and office furniture. Amounts have been budgeted for these purposes as well as for the travel of staff involved in protection and regional refugee law training activities.

(b) **1995 programme proposals**

23. The initial estimate is similar to the 1994 revised estimate except for non-expendable property, which is slightly lower as purchases are expected to take place during 1994.

UNHCR EXPENDITURE IN BELGIUM

(in thousands of United States dollars)

1993	1994		1995	
AMOUNT OBLIGATED	ALLOCATION APPROVED BY 1993 EXCOM	PROPOSED REVISED ALLOCATION	SOURCE OF FUNDS AND TYPE OF ASSISTANCE	PROPOSED ALLOCATION/ PROJECTION
GENERAL PROGRAMMES (1)				
12.7 a/	–	–	VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION	–
59.4 b/	54.2	73.9	LOCAL SETTLEMENT	50.9
–	–	1,080.4	PROGRAMME DELIVERY See Annexes Ia and IIa	1,006.8
72.1	**54.2**	**1,154.3**	**SUB–TOTAL OPERATIONS**	**1,057.7**
1,111.3	1,089.0	329.3	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT See Annexes Ib and IIb	359.9
1,183.4	**1,143.2**	**1,483.6**	**T O T A L (1)**	**1,417.6**
SPECIAL PROGRAMMES (2)				
174.6	–	24.2	OTHER TRUST FUNDS	19.3
–	–	23.0	PROGRAMME DELIVERY	–
174.6	**0.0**	**47.2**	**T O T A L (2)**	**19.3**
1,358.0	**1,143.2**	**1,530.8**	**GRAND TOTAL (1+2)**	**1,436.9**

a/ obligation incurred against Overall Allocation
b/ of which US$ 42 incurred against Overall Allocation